

I am a Millennial

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Angela Hobkirk

Thesis Advisor:

Sarah Waters

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Waters". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2007

Expected Date of Graduation:
May 5, 2007

Acknowledgements

This would not have been possible without the guidance and insight of several people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Sarah Waters; without her insight, I might never have been able to organize my thoughts in a coherent manner. I appreciate her patience with me as I worked to create a quality piece of writing. Without this, I never would have finished. I would also like to thank Mitch Isaacs and Hannah Miller for helping me sort out my ideas and narrow my topic to something manageable. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for acting as a sounding board when I was afraid that I was missing my target audience.

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the characteristics of the newest generation to enter college—the millennial generation. Most of the research and commentary on the millennial generation has been published by those outside of the generation. This thesis is an attempt to give millennials a voice in the literature. In this work, I briefly present some of the current research on the generation and then offer a critique from the perspective of millennial. Also included is commentary from other millennials in an attempt to offer a multitude of perspectives on various topics within the work. In the conclusion, I offer my predictions for the future of the millennial generation.

I am a Millennial

Angela Hobkirk

I was born in 1984 to parents born in 1962 and 1963. I am the oldest of three children, and I have struggled my whole life to figure out how I fit in. According to the research and the year I was born, I am a member of the newest generation to enter college—the millennial generation. Looking at everyone else who is included in this generation has often led me to distance myself from this group. I do not always feel like I fit in or that I belong. I sometimes identify better with the generation of my parents, Generation X. Nevertheless, if I am going to place myself in a generation, I have to claim my millennial status because I was born in 1984, and scholars contend that the millennial generation began in 1982. What things were happening in the world as this generation began to enter our homes?

In 1982, Wayne Gretsky set the current record for number of goals scored in a single hockey season with 92 goals. The United States accused Libya of supporting terrorist groups, and this led them to place a trade embargo on all Libyan oil exports. Ground was broken in Washington D.C. for the Vietnam War Memorial, a project that would be completed later that same year. Canada officially gained its independence from the United Kingdom. President Ronald Reagan became the first president ever to address the British Parliament. Disney's Epcot Park opened its gates to the world. Sony launched the first compact disc player. Michael Jackson released the chart topping number "Thriller". *Time* magazine named the computer as its "Man of the Year". The millennial generation was born.

We've been called a plethora of names including, but definitely not limited to: Generation Y, the Millennials, the Net Generation, the Reagan Babies, the Echo Boomers, the iGeneration, the Second Baby Boom, the D.A.R.E. Generation, the Google Generation, the MySpace Generation, the MyPod Generation, Generation Next, the Nintendo Generation, the Cynical Generation, Generation 9/11, the Next Greatest Generation, the Sunshine Generation,

the Einstein Generation, and the Digital Generation. Why are there so many names for one generation? Are we having an identity crisis, or are we just such a diverse generation that the scholars are not quite sure what to call us yet?

In writing this essay, it is my hope to give the millennial generation a voice in the literature that describes them. To this point, our parents and grandparents have written all the research and literature I have encountered. In this brief glance into the world of the millennial generation, we will explore this literature, and hear what the millennials have to say about it.

What is a Millennial?

Generations are normally seen to be cyclical, beginning every twenty years or so. Researchers start the American generation cycle in 1776. With this in mind, our nation has given birth to about thirteen different generations. The millennial generation is generally accepted to consist of all people born between 1982 and 2001 (Howe & Strauss 1991). The name 'millennial' actually derives from the fact that this generation began to enter college at the turn of the millennium.

Every generation has defining characteristics. For the Baby Boomers, born between 1943 and 1960, it was the sheer size of their generation (Howe & Strauss 1991). At no other time in our nation's history did we have such an increase in the number of births. The Baby Boomers were also the first generation to grow up watching television. This helped to create a sense of unity because people from one side of the country could sit down and watch the same shows as their counterparts on the other side of the country.

The GenXers, born between 1961 and 1981, are known for their angst and distrust of the establishment (Howe & Strauss 1991). They are seen as cynical and nihilistic. This generation experienced a shift away from the idealized family model of their predecessors. As states began

to adopt legislation permitting no-fault divorces, divorces occurred with increasing regularity. With the added momentum of the second wave of the feminist movement, it was not uncommon to see both parents in the workforce. Tradition was challenged by this generation.

So what makes the millennials so different from the generations of their parents and grandparents? In their work *Millennials Go To College*, Neil Howe and William Strauss (2003) give seven distinct characteristics of this emerging generation. Howe and Strauss argue that millennials are special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured, and conventional. In the following paragraphs, we will explore why Howe and Strauss have chosen these characteristics.

Millennials are special. They have been treated as such their whole lives, and they expect this to be reinforced through positive feedback from those with whom they surround themselves. They have been taught to believe that they are a vital part of the nation, and that one day they will be asked to solve many of the world's problems (Howe & Strauss 2003).

Millennials are sheltered. This generation's parents are often described as "over-protective" because they are highly protective of their children. This protection extends well beyond what have been considered the traditional active parenting years, the years between birth and leaving the home. The millennials also experienced an increase in safety initiatives. For example, this generation took part in drug education classes, watched public service announcements about bicycle helmets, and attended workshops with their parents to ensure the car seat they were sitting in was installed properly (Howe & Strauss 2003).

Millennials are confident. They have faith in themselves and their future. It is not uncommon to hear a millennial brag about what they have accomplished and what they foresee

to be their future accomplishments. They believe they are always “right”, and they are generally optimistic (Howe & Strauss 2003).

Millennials are team-oriented. They would much rather work in a group than as an individual. Within these group structures, they prefer the leadership roles to be divided equally instead of given solely to one person. Millennials do not want to stand out, and prefer to blend in to their group. They tend to frown upon selfish motives, and they value altruism. This makes them more open to service learning opportunities than previous generations (Howe & Strauss 2003).

Millennials are achieving. Grades are important to millennials. They focus much of their energy on excelling academically and in their extracurricular activities. Millennials believe that if you go to college and do well, you will be rewarded with a high paying job. Because they focus so much on this, they may actually miss some of the social aspects of the collegiate experience. They tend to focus more on what they can do for the world instead of what they can do for themselves. This shift in focus also contributes to their team-oriented attitude (Howe & Strauss 2003).

Millennials are pressured. This is arguably the first generation to lead highly scheduled lives. As children, their days are pre-planned by the hour and filled with lessons, practices, play dates, and tutoring appointments. With such a high level of structure introduced at such a young age, many fear that this generation will lose its sense of spontaneity. Because they have been taught that success is of utmost importance, millennials tend to take on too many things at once. When they realize this, however, they do not try to cut things out of their schedule. Instead, they feel like everyone else should understand the amount of stress they are under, and they should accommodate them accordingly (Howe & Strauss 2003).

Millennials are conventional. This generation has great respect for authority. They respect their parents, and they value their insight. This generation is more accepting of their parents' beliefs and values than previous generations, and they believe in establishing rules in line with these values and beliefs in order to ensure social order. This generation will be more open to governmental initiatives and rules as they believe such things will help stabilize the society (Howe & Strauss 2003).

For the most part, I agree with Howe and Strauss. They bring up many good points. Millennials are most of the things they said above, but they are also so much more. To just characterize them with such general ideas does a disservice to the generation. There are people who fit the above characteristics exactly. Then, there are people like me—people who don't fit the mold quite so closely, and this may make them feel as if they do not fit in because they do not share all of the characteristics.

We know we are special. We have heard it a million times before. We know that for many of us, our parents waited to have us until they were older, and many times, they spent a lot of money to have us. We come from smaller families, and we have received more attention and support than our parents received as children—they make sure to remind us of this. Therefore, of course we know we are special.

As for sheltered, I agree that for the most part we have been protected more than our parents may have been growing up. The term “over-protective” is commonplace. Our parents go to great lengths to protect us; after all, we are special to them. We have even seen the birth of a rather new phenomenon known as “helicopter parents”. Helicopter parents are those parents that “hover” over their children and are still in the active parenting phase long after their children have left the home. This phenomenon is showing up on college campuses everywhere.

I know of one situation where a first generation college freshman, let's call her Elaine, was having issues with another girl, let's call her Lisa, on her floor in her residence hall. When approached by a mediator, Lisa wanted to resolve the issue immediately, and she was more than willing to sit down and talk about the problem so a solution could be reached. When the mediator approached Elaine, however, she wanted nothing to do with the situation. She would much rather avoid the conflict all together as if it had never existed. If a solution had to be reached, she wanted the mediator to go back and forth. Elaine's mother even called the mediator and said that Elaine would not be involved in the conflict any longer, and if the mediator wanted to pursue a solution to the problem, she would just have to work with Lisa to be more compassionate. Eventually, Lisa agreed not to talk to or about Elaine, and Elaine pretended it had never happened.

Later in the semester, Elaine began to have issues with her roommate, let's call her Anne. Anne confronted Elaine in their room one night, and Elaine immediately shut down. She told Anne to leave and that she did not want to talk to her anymore. Anne was frustrated because Anne just wanted to resolve what she thought was a minor problem. Again, the mediator became involved. The mediator talked to both parties. Anne wanted to talk to Elaine and come to a compromise. Elaine, however, did not want to talk about the problem. She refused to talk to Anne and the mediator. Soon after, Elaine's mother again called the mediator. She told the mediator that she thought the mediator understood that Elaine would not be involved in a confrontation because she was a sensitive person, and she could not handle a conflict. Instead, she told the mediator Anne should just move out so Elaine's life would not be disrupted.

In the above example, Elaine's mother is a helicopter parent. She loves her daughter, but she is so protective and attached to her daughter that she would much rather solve any conflict

her daughter has than expose her to the negativity that can arise in such situations. Howe and Strauss are right to say that this generation is sheltered. Our parents are just trying to do what they think is best for us, and often times that means being “over-protective” and “hovering” over us.

Our generation is confident—to a point. We are confident in ourselves and our abilities, but we welcome praise and validation for the things we accomplish. Howe and Strauss say that we are confident in ourselves and our futures. This is true. We have been told since we were in diapers that we would do great things, and we know we have a support system in place to help us achieve our goals. I do not agree that we always brag about what lies ahead for our generation and ourselves. I realize that some people brag about their accomplishments, but I would rather shy away from that kind of attention. I do not feel as though I have a right to brag about what I have done when others have done so much more to make this world a better place. As far as the “always right” attitude suggested by Howe and Strauss, I completely agree. Of course, we are always right. I know that I personally struggle to admit that I could be wrong or that someone else has a more valid point; but if I am always right, it does not matter what they have to say.

Maybe I am alone in this, but I do not see our generation as team-oriented. I do agree that we are often forced to work in groups, and this may be where that generalization comes from. However, just because our teachers, professors, and employers make us work in groups does not by any means prove that we like to engage in this type of behavior. During my undergraduate career, I have far too often heard people complain about group work to believe that most of us prefer it. Students often whine about being placed in a group to do major projects because they suspect that they will probably end up doing all the work. They protest to the professor, and the professor tells them that it will be good for them to learn to work in a team.

In one class that I helped instruct as an undergraduate, there was final project that could be rather involved depending upon how much effort the students were willing to put into it. The project was designed to be a group project. However, when we asked the class at midterm to tell us what they were doing for their project and who they were working with, more than half the class indicated that they had chosen to work by themselves. If we were as team-oriented as Howe and Strauss suggest, I think many more students would have chosen to work in groups.

Our generation is focused on achievement. For as long as I can remember, I knew that coming home with anything less than nearly perfect grades was unacceptable. My mother always told me that I was capable of achieving high marks, and she expected to see it reflected in my final grades with each report card. When I entered high school, the focus remained on grades, but it also shifted to the number of extracurricular activities I could fit in so I could show colleges that I was involved, committed, and still able to earn top grades. We know that we have to achieve if we want to succeed, and why would we not want to succeed?

We are pressured. To deny that fact, I would have to be completely ignorant. I cannot count how many times I have felt pressured and overwhelmed. Multi-tasking is common, and we often cite it as a skill on our résumés. However, it can be very difficult—especially when the tasks you are trying to juggle are all seemingly of equal importance. It is not easy, but we know we have to master this skill if we want to succeed. The culture we have grown up in is so fast-paced, that we have to be able to do multiple things at once just to keep up. Unfortunately for us, it is just going to get faster as technology becomes more advanced. We will figure out some way to manage, but we will just become even more overwhelmed as we try to learn a new way to balance our responsibilities.

To say that we are conventional would also be correct. Our nation is currently in the midst of a conservative upswing. We are returning to traditional values, and our generation embraces this. After seeing the ramifications of no-fault divorce first hand, our generation is striving to return to a more responsible and stable time so that our children will not experience the instability and turmoil that so many of us have experienced. Do not misunderstand me, we like to challenge the world around us because we know this is the only way we can improve it. However, we dislike ambiguity, and we value authority. I recently asked Andrea, a 19-year-old first generation college freshman, if she and her friends questioned the world around them. She responded, "Yeah....well, unless it's someone in charge like your teachers or parents or like the police or something. That's just not cool. We ask a lot of questions, but if someone who is more important and smarter tells us something, we listen."

Recently, while reading the newspaper, and by newspaper I mean comics, I came across one comic that summed up many of the things I had heard in the media about the millennial generation. The comic reads, "My teacher said there are SIX senses...smell, sight, hearing, touch, taste and entitlement." The perceptions of this generation are far reaching into the minds of the public. This little cartoon suggests that millennials feel as though they are deserving of things for which they have not worked. If we are seeing this type of message appear in comics, we can safely assume that this sentiment is shared within popular culture.



I see this sense of entitlement everywhere in our generation. I have even seen it in my own family. Our parents have worked hard to attain their status. As children of successful parents, many millennials feel as though they should be treated at the same level as their parents, and they should not have to work so hard to obtain the same things obtained by their parents. During my time in the residence halls all through my undergraduate career, I saw this behavior on an almost daily. Students would complain about the lack of air conditioning and quickly follow their complaint with “Well, *I* have central air at home.” They do not recognize that the accommodations of their parents do not belong to them. When a student comes to college, they all come in with the same socioeconomic class—the broke college student class. Let’s be honest about this. *We* do not have anything but the clothes on our backs, and even then, our parents most likely purchased those for us.

What is the Defining Moment of This Generation?

Every generation is defined by at least one key moment—a moment that most people in the generation can identify with and remember. Researchers have thrown out dozens of moments they believe to hold that defining feature for the millennial generation. However, many of the moments and events that have been proposed as ‘defining moments’ for this generation occurred long before they could make a solid impression upon the minds of millennials. Let’s examine a few of these proposed moments and see what millennials have to say about them.

The first event we will look at is the U.S. space shuttle Challenger disaster in 1986. For those unfamiliar with this event, on January 28, 1986, U.S. space shuttle Challenger exploded in flight after having only been in the air for 73 seconds. On board were seven astronauts and one teacher who had won the opportunity to be the first teacher in space. Engineers were trying to at the least postpone the flight because of worries about the recent spell of cold temperatures and

their effects on the shuttle. Their voices were not listened to, and disaster ensued. Could this be the defining moment of the millennial generation?

When I talked to millennials about this event as a possible defining moment, many were confused, and needed me to explain what actually happened. As I would begin to recount the details, many sighed and responded, “Oh, I know about that.” One girl, a twenty-one year old college senior named Kelly said, “I think I remember my teacher telling me about that. I think he was the runner-up if the other teacher couldn’t go, and the explosion really bothered him.” After sifting through similar responses, it became obvious to me that this was not the defining moment of this generation. Too many people did not know what had happened, and those that did only knew what had been told to them about the tragedy that had unfolded that day.

A second event that has been suggested to be a defining moment of the millennial generation is the Oklahoma City bombing. On April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh parked a 20-foot rental truck with nearly 5,000 pounds of combustible material outside of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. At the time, this was the worst attack on American soil leaving 168 people dead (CNN, 1996).

Many of the millennials I spoke with remembered this event, but they did not really know a lot about it. Jessica, a 21 year-old college junior, told me, “Even though I know it was a big deal, it’s not a big deal to me. It happened. So what?” Another millennial, Andrea, said, “I don’t really remember it happening. I mean, I know it happened, but I remember the execution [of Timothy McVeigh] better.” While this event was tragic in nature, it does not have the same hold on the hearts and minds of this generation that other events have.

Yet another event has been thrown out as a possible contender—the death of Princess Diana. At the time, many reporters were comparing her death to the assassination of JFK. They

thought that this single event would be tantamount to something that had happened nearly 40 years earlier. On August 31, 1997, millions around the globe woke up to hear that Princess Diana had been killed in an automobile accident earlier that morning in Paris. She was riding with a male companion from an evening out when the car they were riding in crashed into a pillar inside a tunnel. Her male companion died on impact, and she died later on her way to the hospital after suffering from massive internal bleeding and cardiac arrest (Swardson & Trueheart, 1997).

I began to ask about this event and the impression that it left to see if anyone saw it as the defining moment of his or her generation. One millennial, Andrea, laughed. “Princess Diana was a good person and all, but I didn’t really care that she died. I mean, I didn’t know her or anything.” Another millennial, Thea, a 21-year-old first generation college senior, said. “I guess I could see where someone who was completely superficial and oblivious to the world around them would think that. There are so many other important things that [have] happened. Who picked this one?” While, I recognize that Diana was a very important diplomatic figure, and that her death had a great impact on many people, I do not believe the impact upon this generation was significant enough for it to be the defining moment of the generation.

A fourth event that many have suggested to be the defining moment of the generation was the Columbine Massacre that occurred at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado on April 20, 1999. Two young men opened fire on their school just before lunch. They killed 12 students and one teacher and wounded 24 others before they turned their weapons on themselves and committed suicide (Portner, 1999). This event would spur much debate in the public realm about gun control and school safety measures.

This event received a mixed response among the millennials I spoke with. Many of them remember the day very well, and you could see that they were still trying to internalize it. One

millennial, Kelly, said, “I was in my eighth grade history class watching some show when the news came on and told us what was going on. The school immediately went on lockdown. If you breathed wrong for the next few days, they would question you. It was really scary.”

Another millennial, Matthew, a 20 year-old, said, “I remember that you couldn’t wear black trench coats. I was only in the fifth grade, and I didn’t really understand why, I just knew that it was bad.” This event obviously left a strong impression upon those that lived through it. Could this be our defining moment?

The above four events are only a fraction of the events that researchers have noted as important to the millennial generation. Other suggested events include: the demise of the Berlin Wall, the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the Rwandan Genocide, the First Gulf War, Waco Siege involving David Koresh, the Elián González controversy, the Rodney King beating, the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, the O.J. Simpson murder case, the murders of both Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G., great economic prosperity in the 1990s buoyed by the Dot-com bubble, War in Bosnia and Kosovo, the Lewinsky scandal surrounding former President Clinton, the death of Kurt Cobain in 1994, the Y2K bug, the 2000 U.S. Presidential Election dispute between Al Gore and George W. Bush, the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster, the X Prize and beginning of personal spaceflight, the War in Iraq, the Darfur Conflict, the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, Hurricanes Rita and Katrina, the 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, and the Digital revolution in media (Yan 2006).

With such a diverse generation, it is not surprising that there are so many events in contention to be the defining moment of the millennial generation. As a millennial myself, I have strong opinions about this topic. I feel the defining moment of my generation was definitely the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001. On that day, the world

stopped for a moment. I remember exactly where I was and what was happening around me when I heard the terrible news.

I was a junior in high school sitting through a mandatory college fair. I was antsy because I didn't want to be there. I thought the whole thing was worthless, and I was anxiously waiting for lunch because I didn't have afternoon classes that semester. A group of about eleven of us was sitting through a presentation by a local university. Our presenter's phone kept ringing. He kept silencing it. He laughed off the whole thing and told us that his school was just so amazing that everyone wanted to talk to him about it. I rolled my eyes.

After about the seventh time the phone rang, he answered it. In hushed tones you could hear his exclamations, "What? A plane? Are you sure? Oh. My. God." He hung up the phone, covered his mouth, and fought back tears. We were so incredibly confused. He quickly apologized and ran over to the teachers supervising the event, who were now huddled in a corner. They all stared at him as he spoke at a volume we could not hear. One of the math teachers hugged him. Moments later, our principal entered the gymnasium followed by the librarian who was pushing a big screen TV. As the librarian set up the television, our principal addressed us, "There has been a horrible attack on New York".

The rest of the morning was a blur of scenes on the television and people worrying about loved ones. When I left school that day, I turned on National Public Radio and listened as the broadcasters kept recounting the tragedy that had unfolded just hours earlier. I cried. I didn't know anyone in New York. I didn't know anyone in Washington D.C. I didn't know anyone even flying in a plane that day. So, I guess I don't know why I cried, but I cried. It hurt. I don't know why it did, but it hurt. My parents tried to talk to me and my siblings about what had happened, but they couldn't find the words. The conversation quickly dissipated as we stared

into each others' eyes. We could see the hurt and pain the others were experiencing, but there were no words.

The events of September 11, 2001, have defined this generation. We all felt what happened that day. In the days, weeks, and months following that tragedy, we came together as a nation and stood strong in our resolve to heal. No other event in the lifetime of this generation has had such a deep and lasting effect. Since that day, so much about our life has changed. We are in a war that some feel is unjustified while others believe it is the only way. We pretend to be accepting and tolerant of everyone while some of us secretly question the motives of nearly everyone who even appears to be an Arab because we still feel vulnerable to another attack. We've passed so much legislation designed to make the American people safer—or at least feel that way. In only a few short years, our world has drastically changed.

In talking to other millennials, I discovered that we all feel the same way. Amber, an 18 year-old high school senior, stated, "I was only in the seventh grade when it happened, but it feels like...like it happened last week. Is that weird? I just remember so much, and I was only in middle school when it happened. I remember wondering if they would cancel ISTEP." Another millennial, Andrew, a 22 year-old first generation college senior, probably summed it up best when he said, "It's our JFK."

The events of that day have definitely left their mark on this generation. Everything else that has happened during this generation's lifetime is still important, but nothing has had the impact of this singular event. The other events have helped this generation shape their values and beliefs both before and after that tragic day; however, no other event has pulled this generation together in such an immediate and lasting way.

What's Next?

This generation is just now beginning to leave college and realize their potential. There are many high expectations for the things they will accomplish. As stated earlier, many people believe this generation will change the world. They believe that we will fix the problems left behind by our parents, our grand-parents, and every generation before them.

With such ready access to knowledge and information via the Internet, no one really knows what this generation will be capable of accomplishing. As technology allows us to share and explore information at faster and faster speeds every year, we may be only at the beginning of the information revolution. Our planet grows seemingly smaller everyday. No one can predict the impact this generation will have since we will have access to things of which our predecessors could only dream.

One expectation of this generation is that there will be a huge boost in volunteerism. After the attacks on 9/11, this generation was left feeling like they needed to become more engaged in their communities and give something back. In her article "Generation Y Gets Involved", Sharon Jayson cites a study by the federal Corporation for National and Community Service that found a nearly 20% increase in the volunteerism among college students between the years of 2002 and 2005. Many believe this increase will carry over into their lives after college (2006).

However, many also worry that this spike in community service will not translate into political involvement (Jayson 2006). Perhaps members of this generation fail to link civic involvement with community service. Jayson suggests that it is likely that this generation just isn't interested in politics, and this is why this generation seems apathetic toward civic involvement (2006).

Another expectation of this generation is that they will help to re-establish societal norms and values. Because this generation is seen as so conventional, many believe that we will fight to return to a society of traditional values and morals. Because there has been so much turmoil in our lives, it would make sense that we would want to stabilize the world we live in so that we can protect our children from experiencing the same levels of disorder.

Recently, this generation experienced another tragedy. On April 16, 2007, the deadliest shooting in American history occurred on the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. A disgruntled student first opened fire in a residence hall killing two people. He fled the scene, leaving the area police to believe the shootings were an isolated incident. Nearly two hours later, the shooter entered Norris Hall, a building housing engineering classes, and chained the three main entrance doors shut. After firing dozens of rounds of ammunition on the second floor, the shooter turned his weapon on himself. His actions claimed the lives of 25 students and five professors and left many others wounded (Broder, 2007).

This generation was in middle school and high school when the tragedy at Columbine High School unfolded. Now these same young people have experienced a tragedy on a college campus while they too were attending college. No one really knows how this will impact the generation.

A friend of mine recently asked me if I thought these tragedies would increase safety awareness within the generation. Actually, I think it will do the opposite. This generation grew up in highly protective homes, and yet tragedy still found a way to reach them. I believe that this generation will grow desensitized to these types of situations. Of course, they will affect us when they happen, but each recovery time will grow shorter and shorter until there is no

noticeable difference. A 20-year-old college sophomore, Niquita, said, “We won’t think about safety because we think it’s a joke. It doesn’t matter what we do, it still happens. We just have to learn to live with it and move on.”

Looking at the aftermath of this tragedy, it is easy to identify something that our generation has mastered—the ability to recognize, remember, and move on. We know that dangerous things are going to continue to happen. We know that we can try to stop them to the best of our abilities, and they will still happen. However, we also know how to move on. Our generation has had so much experience dealing with tragedies that have left lasting impressions on our hearts and minds. This has made us stronger than other generations. We are closer knit than the generations before us, and we know we can depend on our peers to understand what we feel when another tragedy hits the news.

Closing Thoughts

At the beginning of this essay, I discussed how I did not always feel that I was a millennial. I still do not always feel like a millennial. However, through the course of my research and reflection, I have been able to better appreciate and identify with this generation. As I wrote my thoughts, I realized that, whether I like it or not, I am definitely a member of this generation. I may be slightly sarcastic and cynical, but that probably comes with being the oldest child.

What are my predictions for the generation? I am not completely sure, but I do know whatever we do, it will be amazing because our generation is capable of making a huge difference in this world we live in. I have heard others predict that we will be the next great generation. I think it is probably more accurate to say we will be the *greatest* generation the world has seen to date. Could I be wrong in my assumptions? Absolutely not.

References

- Albright, N. (2007, April 21). Personal Interview.
- Alles, K. (2007, March 9). Personal Interview.
- Berkes, H. (2006, January 28). Challenger: Reporting a Disaster's Cold, Hard Facts. Retrieved April 9, 2007, from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5175151>
- Broder, J. (2007, April 17). Massacre in Virginia. *New York Times*. Retrieved April 27, 2007, from <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F01E1D7113FF934A25757C0A9619C8B63&sec=health&spn=&pagewanted=3>
- CNN. (1996). The Bombing. Retrieved April 26, 2007, from <http://www.cnn.com/US/OKC/bombing.html>
- Coverly, D. (2007, February 22). Entitlement [Comic]. *Speed Bump*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.cartoonistgroup.com/store/add.php?iid=16272>
- Giese, A. (2007, March 10). Personal Interview.
- Hobkirk, A. (2007, February 22). Personal Interview.
- Hobkirk, M. (2007, February 22). Personal Interview.
- Lamb, T. (2007, March 9). Personal Interview.
- Jayson, S. (2006, October 23). Generation Y Gets Involved. *USA Today*. Retrieved January 27, 2007, from http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-10-23-gen-next-cover_x.htm
- Portner, J. (1999, April 28). A Colorado Community Look for Answers After Deadly Attack. *Education Week*, 18(33). Retrieved April 26, 2007, from EBBSCOhost database.
- Saalfrank, A. (2007, February 2007). Personal Interview.
- Stang, J. (2007, March 21). Personal Interview.

- Strauss, W., & Howe, N. (1991). *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*. New York: William Morrow and Company.
- Strauss, W., & Howe, N. (2003). *Millennials Go To College*. New York: Life Course Associates.
- Swardson, A., & Trueheart, C. (1997, August 31). Princess Diana, Boyfriend Killed in Paris. *Washington Post*. Retrieved April 26, 2007, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/diana/stories/crash0831.htm>
- Yan, S. (2006, December 8). Understanding Generation Y. *The Oberlin Review*. Retrieved February 4, 2007, from http://www.oberlin.edu/stupub/ocreview/2006/12/08/features/Understanding_Generation_Y.html